

MISERABLE CONDITION OF INDIAN PEASANTS DURING

SECOND WORLD WAR IN SO MANY HUNGERS BY

BHABANI BHATTACHARYA

MONIKA

Assistant Professor, Department of English, M.H.D. College for Women, Sirsa, Haryana, India

ABSTRACT

*The objective of this research article is to examine the miserable condition of Indian peasants in the course of Second World War, that is, during the battle for independent India. The present article discusses about the first novel of Bhabani Bhattacharya *So Many Hungers!* with regard to poverty, hunger and exploitation of the peasants in the man-made famine of Bengal in 1943, which is an actual story of pre and post independent hunger and poverty in India?*

KEYWORDS: Miserable Conditions, Indian Peasants & Hunger

Received: Dec 02, 2017; **Accepted:** Dec 22, 2017; **Published:** Feb 05, 2018; **Paper Id.:** IJELFEB2018014

INTRODUCTION

Born in Bhagalpur, a town in Bihar, Bhabani Bhattacharya wrote in a nonnative language. He is an eminent Indo-Anglian novelist residing in Maharashtra. From London University, he completed his doctorate on historical research. He is well-known worldwide, and his books are published in twenty-six languages, of which sixteen are published in European. In 1967, for his novel *Shadow from Ladakh*, Bhabani Bhattacharya won the desired Sahitya Akademy Award. His wife, Salila, who is a short-story writer, is Bhattacharya's inspiration in literary recreations.

Bhattacharya worked on Tagore's translations entitled *The Golden Boat*, *Indian Cavalcade*, and a collection of historical sketches. On the eve of the birth centenary of Tagore, *Towards Universal Man* a commemoration volume, was published, and *Steel-Hawk* a collection of fifteen short stories. He wrote five novels—*So Many Hungers* (1947), *Music for Mohini* (1952), *He who rides a Tiger* (1954), *A Goddess named Gold* (1960), and *Shadow from Ladakh* (1967). Bhattacharya presents a true picture of India in all his novels. His thoughts and ideas are highly formative and determined with a social purpose. Smt. Lila Ray writes, "As we read his writing, we hear the dialogue between man and his situation, between man and man and between man and the ideas he lives by."

***So Many Hungers!*—True Representation of Pre and Post Independent Hunger and Poverty Ridden India**

So Many Hungers! is an account of India's struggle for freedom. Although history and literature are generally considered different, Bhattacharya in his novel efficaciously narrates real, historical events of a war-torn India. The concept of Etienne Balibar and Pierre Macherey becomes factual "Literature and history are not set up externally to each other but are in intricate and connected relationship, the historical conditions of existence of

anything like literature.”

Bhattacharya's experience and close connection with men, manners and their personalities permitted him to appreciate the basic qualities of humanity, which in turn was presented efficiently in his novels and short stories. Bhattacharya's writing involves spicy language and has caught the vein of rural speech and the informal behavior of the people, their rustic world and their small and simple views about great things. He regarded that foreign storytellers exhibited untruthful perspective about Indians as they have not understood our way of life and that what is seen at the surface level is not the utmost actuality. His earlier novels have their base in rural Vidarbha. Bhattacharya portrayed the life of rural India in an authentic manner. L. N. Gupta writes:[AQ: The following extract has not been edited as it is extracted from another source.]

Pure intellectuals watch the crowds but do not force themselves on them. They visit slums and absorb the misery of their dwellers in their being. They tour the famine-stricken areas. They look into the shrivelled faces and sunken eyes of the sufferer. They share their distress. But they do not use amplifiers to blare their benefaction. They suffer quietly. The process involves a cycle of seething tensions. The end product is a major work; say a great novel in the case of a fiction writer. It is a monument to its times. Such is the case with Bhabani Bhattacharya.

In *So Many Hungers!* (1947), he talks about hunger for freedom, hunger for food, hunger for power, hunger for sex, hunger for wealth and hunger for fame. Its core motive man's hunger for food and political freedom was entwined on the movements of the Bengal famine of 1943, The Quit Movement of 1942 and *Satyagraha*, which formed backdrop of his first novel.

This novel involves two story lines — the family of Samarendra Basu, where young Rahoul is the chief character and the family of a peasant where the young girl Kajoli is the protagonist, and the story lines, respectively, depicting the freedom movement or the struggle for freedom and the agonies of the famine. Devesh Basu, the grandfather of Kunal and Rahoul, was part of the civil disobedience movement, which led him to form a band of volunteers and make salt from sea water in contrariness of the law, resulting in his imprisonment. In the meeting of the peasant family and Kishore, Onu proudly discloses that Kanu, the eldest, was born in prison when his mother was jailed for following Gandhiji's *Satyagraha*[AQ: As there is lack of clarity, please mention as to who is Kunal, Kishore, Kanu, and Onu.]. This proves that the people of India had struggled for freedom.

In 1943, the nation faced a dreadful period. Famine in Bengal killed about 1 million people and many others died due to malnutrition and other diseases. The misery and the anxiety of the destitute out in the streets dying out of hunger was depicted effectively in the novel especially through Kajoli and her family and Rahoul as well. During this time, Rahoul went for a short visit to Baruni, a folk village near the Bay of Bengal, where his 70-year-old grandfather, Devesh Basu, lived. Devesh Basu was a retired schoolteacher and also taught the village people lot of values in life. He was called Devata or “God” by the people and they respected him. Rahoul wanted to follow the footsteps of his grandfather, that is, participate in civil disobedience, but his father wanted his son to use his knowledge to help the people. To achieve this goal, his father wanted him to go to London to study physics. At Baruni, Rahoul got acquainted to the peasant family of Devata, comprising the very compassionate mother Xanu, father Kajoli, their well brought up daughter Kanu, the eldest in the family, and Onu, the youngest, and also their beloved milk cow Mangala. Rahoul was taught about the National Movement by his grandfather. The village reconstruction work, being the basis of villager's income, and hence is the top priority of the movement. Though he had the urge to fight for freedom, food and security his wife, Manju, and the baby

held him back.

On the other hand, Samarendra Basu was making easy money from the war. Basu justified his act by saying that his youth days were full of poverty and hence wants his family to lead a luxurious life. However, his dreams shattered with the crash of the Calcutta Stock Market. He started working very hard at the High Court to regain his prestige and social status. In the process of earning money, he decided to monopolize rice to become the Army's lone rice supplier. He wanted to do this business as *Cheap Rice, Ltd.* This idea occurred to him when a beggar begged for rice instead of money. Girish was the grocer of the village, who was planning to exploit the people to fulfill his dreams of owning a bigger home and a store in the district. In this process of fulfilling his dream, a man from the "Kompanee" pledged him a commission if he is able to buy all the rice in the village, basically following the businessmen scheme of buying the rice, storing the supply and raising the price. The same scheme was followed by the government. According to L.N. Gupta:

It was a terrible indictment of the British Raj for all their crimes which aggregated into the disastrous famine of Bengal in 1943.

The story line on the life of Kajoli and her family living in the village Baruni involves a man-made famine affecting 2 million innocent people. Dr. Srinivasa Iyengar states:

So many Hungers! is no doubt an impeachment of man's inhumanity to man, but it is also a dramatic study of a set of human beings caught in a unique and tragic predicament.

Rahoul, gets to read a stories of moral degradation, where a starving mother with a child at her breast was given food. While the mother was eating, the child dies in her lap but the mother continues to eat. Once she finished eating her meal, she leaves her dead child and goes on. Another instance of depravity caused by hunger. A destitute woman got some handfuls of rice after a full day's efforts, but at sunset when she taking the hard-earned rice home along with her three children, a hungry man snatched the grains from her. Another case of moral degradation that Rahoul witnessed was a young girl who showed her breasts to the American soldiers for a rupee or two to buy food for her family. Dr. C. Paul Verghese rightly remarks:

Food is the primary requisite of human dignity; hunger debases and dehumanises man. That is why hunger is the theme of a large number of Indo-Anglian novels. Bhattacharya has dealt quite forcefully with the theme of hunger and the concomitant theme of human degradation in his novel *So Many Hungers!*

The government agents and greedy hoarders forced the peasants to sell their grains to them. To be relieved of their miseries, the peasants had to leave their village. Before leaving the village, Kajoli married Kishore but her happiness was short-lived because Kishore was killed in an accident on his way to Calcutta. After this tragedy, Kajoli and her family had a tough time and had to survive on roots, figs and whatever they could get for food. Kajoli angrily refused a brothel agent from Calcutta when he tried to tempt her. But on the way to Calcutta, Kajoli was given a piece of bread by a soldier who in return fulfilled his sexual hunger by raping her. Adding to the misery, a jackal attacked Kajoli but Onu, the only breadwinner of the family, somehow saved her from it. the repentant soldier hospitalized Kajoli, while her mother and Onu became pavement dwellers and had to live on begging and they became animals, that is, out of hunger, they had to eat what the animals refused to eat. The scene of Onu fighting with a dog for a tin of jam dug out from the rubbish is simply too pathetic, showing how the hunger made both man and animal equal, with no difference. Kajoli's mother was happy that

Kajoli was at least temporarily safe in a hospital with worries about food and well-being. Sir Abalabandhu was a black marketer and the director of the company in which Samarendra Basu was part of. He was also the head of the brothel business that was fast growing in the city.

Kajoli decided to sell her body (at the starting rate of 80 rupees) so that Mother and Onu could live without hunger through a woman who was an agent of Sir Abalabandhu. When she was entering the brothel house, Kajoli heard about the hunger strike led by Devesh Basu inside the prison. Hearing this news, she immediately changed her mind and decided to sell newspapers.

To end all her sufferings, Kajoli's mother walked towards the Ganges but was saved by Rahoul who came that way in a vehicle with others who were arrested and taken to prison. Earlier, while being arrested Rahoul bid good-bye to his family, but his wife Manju was determined that she would follow her husband to prison.

CONCLUSIONS

In the conclusion part of the novel, the end was very bright filled with hope, mainly attained by the intensifying and continuing struggle of the people. 'The Times Literary Supplement' describes the novel as: A factual and vivid account of one of the most shocking disasters in history'.

REFERENCES

1. Bhattacharya, Bhabani. *So Many Hungers*. New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1947.
2. Bhattacharya, Bhabani. *Contemporary Novelists in the English Language*. New Delhi: St. Martin's Press, 1972.
3. Iyengar, K.R. Srinivas. *Indian Writing in English*, New Delhi: Asia Publishing House, 1973.
4. Jha, Rama. *Ganhian Thought and Indo-Anglian Novelists*. New Delhi: Chanukya, 1983.
5. Ray, Lila. 'Bhabani Bhattacharya: A Profile', *Indian Literature*, Vol. XI. No. 2, April- July 1968.
6. Ting Yuan, *Application of Register Theory in Literary Translation A Case Study of the Translation of the Second World War*, *International Journal of English and Literature (IJEL)*, Volume 7, Issue 4, July - August 2017, pp. 97-104
7. Reddy, K. Venkata. *Major Indian Novelists*. New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1990.
8. Sharma, K.K. *Bhabani Bhattacharya: His Vision and Themes*. New Delhi: Abinav Publications, 1979.
9. Shimer, Dorothy Blair. *Bhabani Bhattacharya*, Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1975.